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GREAT RICHES

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Great Riches

By Charles W. Eliot, LL.D.

President of Harvard University



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Great Riches

SINCE the Civil War a new kind of rich man has come into existence in the United States. He is very much richer than anybody ever was before, and his riches are, in the main, of a new kind. They are not great areas of land, or numerous palaces, or flocks and herds, or thousands of slaves, or masses of chattels. They are in part city rents, but chiefly stocks and bonds of corporations, and bonds of states, counties, cities, and towns. These riches carry with them of necessity no visible or tangible responsibility, and bring upon their possessor no public or semi-public functions.

The rich men are neither soldiers nor sailors; they are not magistrates, or legislators, or church dignitaries. They are not landlords in the old sense; and they never lead their tenants into battle as did the feudal chiefs. They have no public functions of an importance commensurate with their riches. They are not subject to the orders and caprices of a sovereign,

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or forced to contend with the intrigues and vices of a court. Such occupations as they have, in addition to the making of more money, they have to invent themselves. The public admires and envies them, and sees that they are often serviceable, but also criticises and blames them, and to some extent fears them. It is disposed to think them dangerous to the Republic and a blot on democratic society; but at the same time is curious about their doings and their mode of life, and is in rather a puzzle about their moral quality. I propose to consider briefly some of the advantages and disadvantages which great modern riches bring the owner and the community.

I

Comforts

The modern very rich man can, of course, procure for himself and his family every comfort. He can secure invariably all possible comfortable provisions in every place where he dwells, — in his own houses, or in hotels, trains, and steamers; but still his wealth will not ordinarily procure for him greater personal comfort than persons of moderate fortune can command. A twelve-dollar chair may be just as

comfortable as a fifty-dollar chair. There is pleasure in living in a palace; but when its inmates want to be comfortable they get into the small rooms, — into the boudoir, or the little writing-room, or the low-studded small parlor. A soft bed is for many persons not so comfortable as a hard one. In short, adequate warmth and light, appropriate clothing, good bedding, good plumbing, and nice chairs, tables, and household fittings sufficient to ensure bodily comfort, are easily within the reach of all well-to-do persons; and great riches can do no more for their possessor in the way of comfort. The least physical ailment, like a gouty toe, or a dull ear, or a decayed tooth, will subtract more from comfort than all the riches in the world can add.

ii

Pleasures

With pleasures it is different. Some real pleasures are very expensive, and only great riches can procure them. For instance, the unobstructed and impregnable possession of a fine natural landscape is a great pleasure which the very rich man can secure for himself by his private means; whereas the poor man, or the man of moderate means, can enjoy such a priv-

ilege only by availing himself of great public domains, or of unoccupied regions; and there his own privilege will not be secure, or transmissible to descendants. The very rich man can provide himself with music and the drama without regard to their cost; but it by no means requires very great riches to procure a quite adequate amount of these pleasures. Such pleasures as involve the purchase and maintenance of very costly machines like yachts, or large automobiles, or of great stables filled with fine horses and carriages, or of large greenhouses and gardens, may be enjoyed in their extremes only by the very rich; but then, on a smaller scale, similar pleasures may be equally enjoyed by persons who are only moderately well-off, and often the larger scale does not add to the pleasure. An active boy in a knock-about twenty feet long may easily get more fun out of racing or cruising than his fifty-year-old father can get out of his six-hundred-ton steam yacht. The young lawyer who is fond of riding may easily get more pleasure out of his single saddle horse, kept at a club stable, than the multi-millionaire gets from his forty horses and twenty different carriages.

One advantage the very rich man undoubtedly has. Many so-called pleasures pall after a little

while. The possessor of numerous horses and carriages, for example, finds that he has no pleasure in driving or riding. He is tired of it all. Or, to his surprise, he finds his yacht a bore, and, on the whole, a plague. Then he can cast aside the pleasure which is no longer a pleasure, and take up with some new fad or fever. He can utterly disregard cost in turning from one pleasure to another. He can seize on costly novelties which promise a new pleasurable sensation, and experiment with them on a small chance of winning some satisfaction. This is assuredly a freedom which great riches bring; but it is not a very valuable freedom. One steady, permanent outdoor pleasure, if pursued with unflagging delight, is worth many shifting transitory pleasures. Pleasures

The public does not grudge their pleasures to the very rich, provided they can be pursued without harming others. Indeed, the public approves all the manly, outdoor, risky sports of the rich, if not inconsiderately pursued, and rather prefers the very rich man who is extravagant in these ways to one who has no interest in sports.

The pleasure of travelling is one which is open to the very rich, and this is in general an instructive and enlarging pleasure. The length

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of the traveller's purse is, however, the least important item in his equipment. The main items are eyes to see beauty, ears to appreciate music, a memory stored with historical information, and power to talk with the peoples visited. The very rich man, although poorly equipped, will do well to travel far and often; but his relatively impecunious neighbor who is mentally well prepared for foreign travel will far better enjoy his journeyings, although they be much cheaper than the rich man's.

iii
Luxuries

When it comes to what are called luxuries, the very rich have undoubtedly an advantage over other people, if one can imagine the possession and use of a luxury to be in any sense an advantage. Thus, the very rich can procure for themselves all sorts of rare and delicious foods and drinks. They can have fruits and vegetables out of season, and fish and game brought from afar. They can drink the finest champagne, or claret, or Rhine wine, or cordial, without ever considering its cost. Indeed, they may prefer a costly drink, and enjoy it more, just for the reason that it is costly.

These pleasures of the palate the man of moderate means can only enjoy in brief seasons or at long intervals. It may be doubted, however, whether the very rich man gets any more pleasure from his palate and his organs of smell in the course of the year than the man who is compelled to follow the changes of the season in the selection of his foods and drinks. Strawberries in January are not so good as strawberries in June, and strawberries for two months of the year, changing to raspberries, currants, blueberries, and blackberries, may give more gratification on the whole than strawberries for six months of the year. The same thing may be said concerning the enjoyment of flowers and flowering plants in the house. The very rich man can order from some florist a profusion of flowers for all the rooms in his house through the entire season. The regular commercial flowers like roses, carnations, violets, chrysanthemums, and so forth, will be supplied in great quantities, and the spring flowers will be forced in greenhouses, and will appear in the drawing-room in January and February. These beautiful objects will adorn the very rich man's rooms the year round, and their fragrance will penetrate every part of his house. He and his family will enjoy them;

but it is doubtful whether he will get so much pleasure out of all this hired decoration as the owner of one little garden and one little glass bow window will get out of his few beds, pots, and vases filled with only seasonable blooms, all of which he has worked over and cared for himself. At any rate it is a different kind of pleasure, and not so keen and inexhaustible. Money indeed can buy these beautiful objects, but money cannot buy the capacity to enjoy them. That capacity may or may not go with the possession of the money.

iv

Objects of Beauty

There are, however, luxuries of a rarer sort which the very rich man can secure for himself and his family, while the poor man, or the man of moderate means, cannot procure them at all. Such a luxury is the ownership of beautiful artistic objects, — of fine pictures, etchings, statuary, or beautiful examples of ceramic art.

To have these objects in one's house within reach, or often before the eyes, is a great luxury, if their possessor has eyes to see their beauty. This is a clear advantage which the very rich man may have over a man of small

means. When, however, the accumulator of great riches is an uneducated man, as is often the case, he is little likely to possess the intellectual quality which is indispensable to the enjoyment of the fine arts. This is one of the reasons that the newly rich are apt to be ridiculed or despised. They are thought to be people who are pecuniarily able to gratify fine tastes, but have no such tastes.

The possession of beautiful and costly jewels is a luxury which rich people—whether educated or ignorant—often seem to enjoy. They like to see their women decked with beautiful gems. It is to be said in behalf of this luxury that it is a gratification which does no bodily harm to anybody, and gives pleasure to many observers besides the possessor of the jewels. The only criticism which can be made on indulgence in this luxury is that the money it costs might have been more productive of human happiness if spent in other ways. A million dollars' worth of diamonds, rubies, emeralds, and pearls might have endowed a school or a hospital, or have made a mill or a foundry a healthy place to work in instead of an unhealthy one, or have provided a public playground for many generations to enjoy. Nevertheless, in some measure nearly every one en-

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joys this particular luxury, whether in savage or in civilized society.

V

Aids to Health

In the care of health—their own and that of those they love—very rich people have certain indisputable advantages, although they also suffer from peculiar exposure to the diseases consequent on luxury and ennui. Thus, they are under no necessity of enduring excessive labor, but can order their daily lives so as to avoid all strains and excesses in work. Moreover, if any physical evil befall them or those they love, they can procure all possible aids in the way of skilled attendants and medical or surgical advice; and they can procure for themselves and their families any advised change of scene or climate, and procure it at the right moment, and in the most comfortable way. Lord Rosebery has pointed out that this freedom to spend money for aids in case of sickness or accident is the chief advantage the rich man has over the poor man; but it should be observed that one need not be very rich in order to procure these advantages in case of illness or accident. Moreover, remedies for dis-

ease are a poor substitute for health. The ability to pay for any amount of massage is an imperfect compensation for the loss of enjoyable use of the muscles in work and play, or for the exhaustion of the nervous system. No one who has had large means of observation can have failed to see that the very rich are by no means the healthiest and most vigorous members of the community. The uneducated rich seem to be peculiarly liable to medical delusions, perhaps because their wealth enables them to try in quick succession all sorts of expensive cure-alls and quackeries. Their wealth has its own disadvantageous effects on their bodies. Thus, the keen pursuit of wealth is often exciting and exacting; to keep and defend great wealth is sometimes an anxious business; and if great riches bring with them a habit of self-indulgence and of luxurious living in general, it is well-nigh certain that the self-indulgent and luxurious person will suffer bodily evils which his plain-living neighbors will escape. Of course a wise rich man may escape all these perils of luxury. He may keep himself in good physical condition by all sorts of outdoor sports. He may do as the Duke of Wellington is said to have habitually done—provide elaborate French dishes for his guests

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at dinner, and himself eat two plain chops and a boiled potato; but such an habitual self-protection requires an unusual amount of will-power and prudence. Health being the chief blessing of life after the domestic affections, the fact that very rich people have no advantage over common people in respect to keeping their health, but rather are at a disadvantage, suggests strongly that there is a formidable discount on the possession of great riches.

VI

Satisfactions not Dependent on Wealth

All thinking men and women get the main satisfactions of life, aside from the domestic joys, out of the productive work they do. It is therefore a pertinent inquiry — what occupations are open to the very rich, occupations from which they can get solid satisfaction? In the first place, they can have, on a large scale, the satisfaction which accompanies the continuous accumulation of property. This satisfaction, however, is fortunately a very common one. The man or the woman who earns five or six hundred dollars a year and lays up a hundred dollars of this income, may enjoy this satisfaction to a high degree. It is a serious error to

suppose that satisfaction in the acquisition of property is proportionate to the amount of property acquired. A man can be as eager and pleased over the accumulation of a few hundred dollars as he can be over a few million; just as it may be much more generous for one man or woman to give away five dollars than it is for another to give away five hundred thousand. That is the reason that property is so secure in a democracy. Almost everybody has some property; and the man who has a little will fight for that little as fiercely as the man who has a great deal. The passion for accumulation is doubtless highly gratified in the very rich man's case; and there is apparently a kind of pride which is gratified by the possession of monstrous sums merely because they are monstrous, just as some people seem to be gratified by being twitched through space at the ratè of fifty miles an hour because it is fifty and not twenty. This well-nigh universal desire to acquire and accumulate is, of course, the source of the progressive prosperity of a vigorous and thrifty race. It provides what is called capital. The very rich man has unquestionably much more capacity in this direction than the average man. He accumulates on a much larger scale than the average man, and

Satisfactions

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in all probability, although his satisfaction is not proportionate to the size of his accumulations, he gets somewhat more satisfaction from this source than the man whose accumulations are small.

To build a palace at fifty years of age in city or country, and maintain it handsomely for his family, seems to be a natural performance for a very rich man. It is interesting to build a palace, and it affords some temporary occupation; but it is incredible that this achievement should give as much pleasure to the owner as a young mechanic gets who has saved a few hundred dollars, and then builds a six-room cottage, to which he brings a young wife. He, being skilful at his trade, builds the cottage largely with his own hands, and she, out of her savings, provides the household linen and her own wardrobe. The achievement of the mechanic and his wife is a personal one, hallowed by the most sacred loves and hopes. The palace is the rich owner's public triumph, finely executed by hired artists and laborers. It is a personal achievement only in an indirect way.

The Rich Man's Power

A great capital at the disposal of a single will confers on its possessor power over the course of industrial development, over his fellowmen, and sometimes over the course of great public events like peace or war between nations. For some natures it is a real satisfaction to be thus a sort of Providence to multitudes of men and women, able at pleasure to do them good or harm, to give them joy or pain, and in position to be feared or looked up to. Great capital directed by one mind may be compared to the mill pond above the dam, which stores power subject to the mill owner's direction. There is pleasure and satisfaction in directing such a power; and the greater the power, the greater may be the satisfaction. In giving this direction the great capitalist may find an enjoyable and strenuous occupation. For a conscientious, dutiful man a great sense of responsibility accompanies the possession of power, and this sense of responsibility may become so painful as to quite overcome all enjoyment of the power itself; but nevertheless we cannot but recognize the fact that the exercise of power gives pleasure and satisfaction without this draw-

back to men of arbitrary temperament, or of an inconsiderate disposition which takes no account of the needs or wishes of others.

The most successful businesses are those conducted by remarkably intelligent and just autocrats; and probably the same would be true of governments, if any mode had been invented of discovering and putting in place the desirable autocrats. The prevailing modes of discovery and selection, such as hereditary transmission, or election by a Pretorian guard or an army, have been so very unsuccessful that autocracy as a mode of government has justly fallen into disrepute. In business enterprises the existing modes of discovering and selecting autocrats seem to be better than in governments; for autocracy in business is often justified by its results. The autocrat in business is almost invariably a capitalist; and when he possesses great riches he may be, and often is, highly serviceable to his community or his nation through his beneficial direction of accumulated and stored power. Whether he himself wins satisfaction through the exercise of his power depends on his temperament, disposition, and general condition of physical and moral health. When great riches are stored up in possession of one man, or one family, the

power which resides in them can be directed by one mind into that channel, or those channels, where it can be made most effective, and this effective direction it is which brings out in high relief the usefulness of great riches.

What are ordinarily called benefactions—that is, gifts for beneficial uses—are, therefore, by no means the only benefits very rich men can confer on the community to which they belong. Any man who, by sound thinking and hard work, develops and carries on a productive industry, and by his good judgment makes that industry both profitable and stable, confers an immense benefit on society. This is indeed the best outcome of great riches.

viii

Improving the Land

Very rich men can, if they choose, win certain natural satisfactions which are not accessible to the poor or to the merely well-to-do. If they have the taste for such labors, they can improve fields and woods, brooks and ponds, make a barren soil fertile, raise the best breeds of cattle, horses, swine, and sheep, and in general add to the productiveness and beauty of a great estate. They can develop landscape

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beauty on a large scale, making broad tracts of country more beautiful and more enjoyable. Since earth-work is the most durable of all human works, the wise improvement of a great estate is a lasting contribution to human welfare and a worthy occupation of any man's time. It is a subject which will usefully employ all the senses of the keenest observer and the best judgment of a prudent but enthusiastic inventor and promoter. Whoever makes a farm, a forest, or a garden yield more than it did before has made a clear addition to mankind's control of nature. For persons who have a natural taste for such employments a keen gratification accompanies success in them. Very rich men can win this satisfaction with greater certainty than men who must always be considering whether the improvement they have projected will forthwith pay its cost.

There is, however, a serious drawback on the satisfaction very rich men can derive from improving their estates, namely, an uncertainty with regard to the maintenance of the improved estate in the family of its chief creator. In this country it is difficult to pass down to another generation large holdings of land, at least with any assurance that the holdings will be kept. It frequently happens that no child of the rich

man wishes, or is even willing, to keep up its father's establishment; and indeed, in many cases no child is really able to maintain the father's establishment, having received only a fraction of the father's capital. Estates inherited through three generations are rare in the United States, particularly great estates brought together by very rich men. Ordinary farms are in a few cases transmitted through three generations, and some farms which have been lost to the family which made them are at times bought back in later generations by descendants of the original proprietors; but on the whole the transmission of landed estates from generation to generation is unusual in this country. Any rich man, therefore, who spends thought and money on the improvement of a large estate must always feel uncertain whether his fields and woods will remain in the possession of his family. In the neighborhood of large cities almost the only way to make sure that an estate, which the owner has greatly improved by his own thoughtfulness and skill, will remain in good condition is to get the estate converted into a public domain. On an estate which becomes public property the chances are that all improvements will be maintained and that care will be taken to pre-

Improving the Land

serve all its landscape beauties. It is only a generous and public-spirited man, however, who looks forward with satisfaction to this fate for fields and forests which have become dear to him.

IV

The Higher Opportunities of Wealth

In some exceptional cases a rich man uses his riches in pursuit of intellectual satisfactions of his own, for the full attainment of which riches are necessary, but which are in no way connected with his capacity for accumulating property. Such a fortunate rich man, having acquired great wealth, uses it to meet the costs of his own scientific investigations, or in acquiring a fine library on a subject to which he had devoted himself before he was rich; or he retires somewhat early in life from money-making and gives himself to study and authorship with every aid or facility which money can procure. These are the most fortunate of rich men. They obtain congenial intellectual satisfactions. They make themselves serviceable, and they have a better chance than most rich men of bringing up serviceable children.

It is obvious that very rich men have power to render services to the public which it is im-

possible for poor men or men of moderate incomes to render. They can endow churches, schools, universities, libraries, hospitals, museums, gardens, and parks with sums large enough to give these institutions stability and continuous usefulness. They can also come to the aid of private individuals who have suffered through illness, premature death of friends, or other disasters which justify helplessness. They can help widows and children bereft of their natural protectors and bread-winners. They can help young men and women to an education which will raise for the persons helped the whole level of their subsequent lives. All these things they can do on a scale impossible to men of moderate means. Great riches are constantly used in our country in all these ways to an extent which has never before been equalled, and which entitles the American very rich man to be recognized as a type by himself.

The Higher Opportunities of Wealth

The first question which arises about this beneficial use of great wealth is this: Does it give pleasure or satisfaction to the givers; and is this pleasure or satisfaction, if any, proportionate to the magnitude of the gifts? Does a man who gives $100,000 to a college or an academy get more pleasure from his gift than a man who gives $1,000, the first man being

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one hundred times richer than the second man? That there is real pleasure or satisfaction for the giver in his giving is altogether probable; and it is quite possible that the pleasure in large giving is proportionate to that largeness, although the pleasure of acquisition is not proportionate to the amount acquired. Experience seems to show that it is difficult for a very rich man to give away intelligently and with enjoyment as large a proportion of his income as a man in moderate circumstances can easily give away. The proportion of an income given away ought to mount rapidly with the increase of the income, but experience indicates that it does not. It is no easy task to select wisely objects for great benefactions and to give money to the selected objects without doing injury. Thus, to endow a church, unless with its building and equipment only, is generally a mischief, not a benefit. The giving of thoroughly good things, like education and opportunities for travel or healthful exercise, to young people who are not bound to the giver by ties of kinship is accompanied by great difficulties. It is easy to pauperize the individuals helped. It is easy to destroy their self-reliance and their capacity for productive labor.

V

Giving by Men of Wealth

Very rich men differ greatly with regard to their method of giving. Some give quickly, with slight investigation concerning the objects to which they give. Others make the most careful and thorough investigation before making gifts, employing experienced agents in their inquiries, and ascertaining the merits and demerits, the advantages and disadvantages, of the institution or society they think to aid. Some men of great wealth approach the whole subject of giving away money with conscientiousness and with a painful sense of responsibility for the use of wealth entrusted to them; and this sense of responsibility may greatly impair their comfort or satisfaction in the power to give. Other men, no richer, give away great sums without serious examination and without any oppressive sense that they hold their property in trust for the benefit of the community. One anxiety, which most conscientious givers on a large scale feel, is the anxiety lest, by coming with large gifts to the support of an institution or association, they impair what may be called the natural or constitutional resources of the institution or associ-

ation—such, for example, as the giving power of the alumni of a college or the yield of the annual taxes or subscriptions in a church. It is commonly dangerous for a school, or college, or library to get the reputation of being the special charge of a very rich individual or family. On this account givers of large sums often make it a condition of their gifts that some other sum shall be procured simultaneously from other friends of the institution. Every very rich man who is in the habit of making gifts to individuals and to institutions has met, in many instances, with a complete or partial defeat of his benevolent purpose; but most of these defeats or failures occur in attempts to aid individuals rather than institutions. The nineteenth century witnessed a considerable change in the destination of endowments. Endowments for palliating some of the evils that afflict society used to be the commonest, such as endowments for almshouses, doles, and hospitals; but now endowments for various sorts of education—such as academies, colleges, free-lecture courses, libraries, and museums supply—have become the commonest; and these last forms are far the wisest, because they are much more than palliations of evil. They are creators and diffusers of good.

Through this change the chance of the very rich man to do perpetual good with his money has been greatly increased; and surely the hope of doing some perpetual good with the product of one's intelligence, skill, and industry is one of the brightest of human hopes.

vi

The Children of the Very Rich

The most serious disadvantage under which very rich people labor is in the bringing up of their children. It is well-nigh impossible for a very rich man to defend his children from habits of self-indulgence, laziness, and selfishness. The children are so situated, both at home and at school, that they have no opportunity of acquiring any habit of productive labor. They do nothing for themselves, or for their parents and brothers and sisters. They have no means of acquiring the habit of coöperative work except in their sports, and in not all of those. The farmer's children coöperate from their tenderest years in the work of the household and the farm. The very rich man's child is absolutely deprived of that invaluable training. Moreover, the artificial training which a very rich man can buy in the market for his

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child is determined as to its quality, not by his own intelligence and wishes, but by what former generations have produced in the way of educational institutions and private tuition. The rich man can find no better school for his boy and girl than has been developed without his aid, and mostly by a preceding generation. When the multi-millionaire comes to realize that he wants something for his child which the institutions of his time do not furnish, he can help to improve the defective institutions for the benefit of other people's children in subsequent years, but it is too late to improve them for his own children. The very rich man's sons know, first, that they will have no need of earning their living; secondly, that their father can, if he choose, enable them to marry early, and to continue to live, without any exertion on their part, in the same luxurious way in which they have always lived in their father's house; thirdly, that mental exertion will be as unnecessary for them as physical exertion. They are therefore deprived of all the ordinary motives for industry and the assiduous cultivation of their powers, bodily and mental. Further, it is almost impossible to bring them up to a simple habit of life which takes account of the feelings and interests of

others. Unless disciplined by ill-health or other personal misfortunes, they almost inevitably become self-indulgent and unambitious. This condition of a rich man's children is worse in the democratic society of the United States than in the older aristocratic societies of Europe, because here no duties or responsibilities are inherited with their riches by the rich man's children. The children of the rich have with us no duties to the state, and no recognized duties to their family, or even to the creator of their wealth. They are not even bound to maintain their father's establishment. They are placed under no obligation to live where their father did, to carry on his business, to maintain his benefactions, or to build on any foundations which he laid. When property consists of stocks and bonds, almost all the safeguards with which feudal society surrounded the transmission of titles and great estates from father to son fail to take effect.

The Children of the Very Rich

The very rich man who succeeds, as some do succeed, in bringing up his children to useful and honorable careers of their own, has had, then, enormous difficulties to overcome. He can only overcome them through the influence of his own personal character, quite apart from the qualities which made him very rich. He

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must possess for himself, and inspire in his children, nobler ambitions than that of being very rich. He must have a high purpose in the use of riches, which his children can see and learn to imitate; and the convincing proof that he himself was possessed by a noble purpose will be the fact that his children escape the great dangers of being brought up rich, and develop a correspondingly high purpose in their own lives. There are, of course, many cases among the children of the rich where the parents' nature is not transmitted to the children, very unlike tendencies appearing in the children from any that the parents exhibited, as when scholarly children with artistic, literary, or scientific tastes appear in the families of uneducated parents whose practical sagacity and industry have made them rich. The impossibility of bringing up children satisfactorily in luxurious homes has led to the establishment of boarding schools of various sorts for the children of the rich; and these schools have steadily increased in number and variety during the past thirty years. They are more necessary for boys than for girls, because the nature of boys is more perverted by luxury than the nature of girls, perhaps because enterprise and ambition seem more indispensable in a man than

in a woman. It seems to be easier to make a boy selfish and indifferent to the feelings and rights of others than to spoil a girl in that way.

The Children of the Very Rich

The effects which very rich people have on their fellowmen are various, being much affected by the personal qualities of the possessors of great wealth and by the popular beliefs as to the sources of their wealth. The multitude recognize that they themselves are strongly influenced by the very same hopes and desires which have been gratified in the case of possessors of great wealth. In a democracy nearly every man and woman wishes and hopes to earn more and more money, and to lay up more and more money, and so to become more and more independent of the anxiety which inevitably accompanies dependence on daily toil to meet daily wants. Moreover, nearly every man and woman admires and respects those abilities which make men rich,—acquisitiveness, frugality, industry, and business sagacity,—so that they are prepared to admire and respect those who possess in a high degree these qualities. On the other hand, the multitude is disposed to despise and condemn the self-indulgence and the luxury which degrade and corrupt the possessors of great riches, together with their children and

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their dependents. The multitude feels a mild reprobation of extravagance, but a hearty contempt for penuriousness and lack of generosity in the very rich. It always experiences, and often expresses, a displeased surprise when a man who has lived without generosity and without splendor is discovered at his death to have been very rich. This is a kind of adverse posthumous judgment which never overtook the very rich in the earlier days when all property was visible, as in land, buildings, flocks, herds, and chattels. Not even generous testamentary dispositions will reconcile the American public to a penurious life on the part of a rich man.

vii

Public Judgments of the Rich

The judgments of the public concerning the means by which great riches have been acquired are fickle and uncertain, because, for the most part, made in the dark. In this respect the public has little confidence in its own impressions, unless legal proceedings have brought to light the course of conduct and events which profited the possessors of great wealth, or the habitual mode of conducting the business which yielded great wealth. In spite

of the fact that monopolies have for centuries been hateful to the main body of the consumers in every nation, the judgment of the public is ordinarily a lenient one toward the creators of successful monopolies, because every one recognizes in himself a longing to secure some sort of monopoly—to become the possessor, for example, of some little art or little skill which nobody else possesses, to raise a vegetable or a flower which nobody else can raise, to write a book or paint a picture which nobody else can produce, to practice a trade or a profession without any effective competitors, or to invent or manufacture a patented article which nobody else can make. The manufacture of a patented article affords a perfect example of monopoly; but the American people, at least, are thoroughly accustomed to such perfect monopolies, and, on the whole, believe them to be suitable rewards for beneficial inventions. In spite, therefore, of the evils caused to the great body of consumers by monopolies, the American public is gentle in its judgment of the conduct of very rich men who have discerned and profited enormously by advantages in business which nobody else could or did procure. Almost every business man feels that if he had had the skill, or the luck, to seize

Public Judgments of the Rich

upon some such advantage, he would not have hesitated to do so. A community which is thoroughly possessed in all its strata with a desire and a purpose to better itself is not likely to be harsh in its judgment of men who have conspicuously succeeded in so doing. To be sure, if a very rich man in pursuing the gratification of his own desires interferes with what his neighbors regard as their own traditional rights and customs, as, for instance, by enclosing large areas over which his neighbors have freely fished or hunted, or by occupying shores which have been open to the resort of a whole neighborhood, he is apt to encounter popular condemnation. If he pursues his pleasures with conspicuous disregard of the comfort or safety of other people he is likely to get into trouble, unless, as is often the case, he can manage in his pursuit of his own pleasures to appear to be only enjoying, or perhaps defending, valuable rights acquired by the whole public.

viii

The World's Attitude Toward Rich Men

In the long run the possessor of great wealth is judged in part by the use he makes of his riches, including in that use his disposal of

them at his death, in part by the nature of the business which made him rich, and in part by the moral quality he manifests in the conduct of his business. If it appears that the rich man recognized his responsibility to society for a right use of his wealth, the public will forgive much expenditure for his own pleasures and for the pleasures of his family, and for the security of his children against the possibility of future want. They will condone great extravagance and waste if, on the whole, a high and liberal purpose guided the man in his accumulations and in his benefactions. The peculiar faculties and powers which lead to the accumulation of riches resemble all other human faculties and powers in the following respect,—they may all be degraded and made sordid by a low purpose or elevated and exalted by a noble one. This is just as true of the powers of memory, invention, and penetrative reasoning as it is of that practical sagacity which leads to the possession of wealth. Even love, that all-hallowing motive when it is pure, unselfish, and spiritual, becomes a fearful implement of moral destruction if it be low and animal. The very rich man is, then, not to be pronounced admirable and happy, or contemptible and miserable, until his account is made up and

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the dominant purpose of his life is made plain. Again, the rich man is judged in part by the quality of the product which made him rich. A beneficial product tends to sanctify riches; a harmful product poisons them. The public judgment is gentler toward men who got rich by producing or selling good petroleum, steel, or copper than it is toward men who produce or sell whiskey, patent medicines, lottery tickets, or advertising space for immoral undertakings. Riches acquired in making mankind more comfortable or healthier are much more likely to give satisfaction to their possessor, and through him to benefit society, than riches acquired through products which are injurious to mankind and so increase the sum of human misery.

xiv

Publicity a Safeguard for Wealth

In regard to judging the morality of the processes by which great wealth has been acquired the public must always meet with serious difficulties and delays; proof of misconduct is hard to get, and even the courts sometimes give an uncertain sound, for business methods which are not illegal may nevertheless be decidedly immoral; for instance, they

may be cruel, greedy, or treacherous, but within the law. Bought suppressions of truth, which in the public interest should be told, are usually immoral but not illegal. The only sure protection of the rich man against suspicions and adverse judgments in this respect is publicity for his methods and results. Many businesses are now under sufficient government supervision to secure some measure of publicity; those conducted in secrecy and with no periodic publication of results are liable to intense suspicion on the part of the public whenever they yield immense fortunes for individuals at short notice. In such cases the public always suspects some sort of foul play or some unearned increment not fairly attributable to unusual foresight. The suddenly rich man finds that the presumptions are all against him in the public mind, and that the public ear is open to the prosecuting attorney but shut to the defence. This distrust is the inevitable penalty for secrecy in money getting on a large scale. Many years may elapse before it is possible to get the final verdict, and oblivion may easily arrive before justice.

Publicity a Safeguard for Wealth

The very rich people, then, like most other things and forces in this world, are a mixed product, and may work either good or evil for

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their neighborhood and their nation. Some of them do great harm by giving conspicuous examples of self-indulgent, pleasure-seeking, trivial lives; others do great good by illustrating the noble and beneficent use of wealth. Some of them, in seeking their selfish ends, corrupt legislatures and courts, trample on the weak, betray trusts, cheat the law, deceive or bribe the agents of the law, raise the prices of necessaries of life, and by their example lower the moral standards of the business community; others use all their influence to improve legislation, the administration of justice, the management of corporations—including that of towns and cities—the execution of trusts, and the education of the people, and to diffuse and cheapen the good gifts of nature. The estimate which the rest of us form of the relatively few very rich men is guided by our opinions concerning their personal characters. We despise and abhor the coarse, ostentatious, selfish, unjust multi-millionaire, while we admire and respect the refined, generous, and just rich man, be his millions few or many, be his benefactions direct through gifts to hospitals, churches, and colleges, or indirect through the improvement of the industries which maintain

and extend civilization or the beautification of the common life.

No Abiding Class of Rich Men

It is quite unnecessary in this country to feel alarm about the rise of a permanent class of very rich people. To transmit great estates is hard. They get divided or dispersed. The heirs are often unable to keep their inherited treasures, or, if by the help of lawyers and other hired agents they manage to keep them, they cease to accumulate, and only spend. This is one of the natural effects on his children of the very rich man's mode of life. With rarest exceptions the very rich men of to-day are not the sons of the very rich men of thirty years ago, but are new men. It will be the same thirty years hence. The wise rich father will try to put his sons into those beneficent professions and occupations which have strong intellectual and moral interest, and in which pecuniary independence is a distinct advantage. Such are the public service in elective or appointive offices, the ministry, scientific research, social service, and the management of

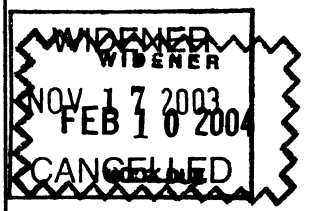
charities and of serviceable endowed institutions. Inherited wealth enables young men to devote themselves early to these fine employments, which are not pecuniarily remunerative but yet possess the highest sort of interest and offer all the rewards of beneficent influence among men. From persons so occupied, from the ranks of the learned and scientific professions, and from the more intellectual and useful sorts of business, the highest class of each generation in a democracy is in large measure recruited. The new-made very rich may or may not belong to this class. The chances are against them, unless they prove themselves men of distinction both mentally and morally.

One of the best tests of the worth of free institutions is their capacity to produce a numerous class of superior persons—rich, well-off, comfortable, or just self-supporting—a class larger in proportion to the mass of the people, and more meritorious than any other form of government has produced. All signs indicate that the American democracy will meet this test.

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